



HIBA ABDALLAH  
**SOUVENIR SHOP**

SEPTEMBER 7 – OCTOBER 22, 2017

**AGM**  
ART GALLERY OF MISSISSAUGA



## **DIRECTOR'S NOTE**

The AGM is pleased to partner with Y+ contemporary to present Hiba Abdallah's Souvenir Shop in the gallery's XIT-RM Emerging Artist Project Space. The AGM is committed to recognizing and supporting the work of emerging artists from the Mississauga and 905 region, and is proud to work with regional artist-run centres to share opportunities and resources with our talented next generation artists and cultural producers!

Thank you to RBC Foundation for their continuing generous support of this program, to Y+ contemporary for curating this exhibition, and for the collaborative support of AGM staff members Kendra Ainsworth, Sadaf Zuberi, Laura Carusi, Melanie Lowe, Sharada Eswar, and Jessica Palada, and our incredible roster of volunteers.

## **ARTIST BIO**

Hiba Abdallah has lived most of her life in Windsor, Ontario, a city that has heavily influenced her interest in the convergence of art and social practice. She is part of the artist collective Broken City Lab, which was long-listed for the 2011 Sobey Art award. She completed her BFA at the University of Windsor in 2012 and her MFA at the University of Guelph in 2017.

## CURATORIAL STATEMENT

Remember. The word is expressed as an imperative, imploring us to recall a past experience. The will to remember is the reason for the existence of souvenir shops, those proverbial retail locations filled with products created for the specific purpose of remembering a place. Objects are emblazoned with iconic texts and images: city names, official logos, and prominent architectural features. For suburban cities like Mississauga, these defining features are often entwined with commercial enterprise. Large regional shopping malls are where most suburban city centres find their origins, with city halls and municipal offices built alongside these planned developments. The result is cities whose identities have come to be associated with commercial endeavours.

In this exhibition, Hiba Abdallah considers the commemoration of place through the lens of a souvenir shop. Constructed to resemble the titular shop, Abdallah presents a series of objects: mugs, pens, postcards, hats, and t-shirts. In place of official logos, each object bears the word remember, printed in a stylized text translated across five written languages: Chinese, Punjabi, Arabic, Polish, and Anishnaabemowin. The first four are among the most common native languages of Mississauga residents; Anishnaabemowin is the language of the Anishinaabe who are the Indigenous peoples of this land. Only in Anishnaabemowin is a question directly posed: Do you remember? What we are being asked to remember is not made explicit, and each translation imbues the request with different connotative weight. The negotiation of this ambiguous space between languages unsettles established narratives of place.

Abdallah engages in what art historian Grace McQuilten has termed mis-design, an attempt to “harness the process of design to misdirect commercial production.” An imitation of the neighbouring commercial landscape, the installation utilizes the visual strategies of retail design to subvert the function of objects in a gallery setting. A pop-up shop aesthetic positions the objects as take-aways that could be replenished or replaced, possibly in response to the city’s changing demographics. Abdallah brings an acute awareness to the multiple communities who are present here, and the histories of immigration and colonialism that have shaped this city.

Abdallah frequently works at the intersections of conceptual art and social practice, and here, her installation confronts us with the use-value of the objects on display and their role in the creation and promotion of civic identity. For those not fluent in any of the featured written languages, the text serves as a visual signifier of the city’s multilingual landscape, accruing meaning through shifts in script and alphabet. Moreover, the circulation of products – a borrowed pen, a proudly worn hat – has the potential to be transformed into a communications network, with the text adorning each object acting as a beacon to others who share a mother tongue. *Souvenir Shop* proposes a re-envisioning of Mississauga’s identity, in its citizens’ own words.

Tiffany Schofield  
Co-founder, Y+ contemporary

<sup>1</sup> Grace McQuilten, *Art in Consumer Culture: Mis-design* (Farnham UK: Ashgate Publishing, 2011), 43

## IMAGE CREDIT

### Cover

Hiba Abdallah, *Remember Mug*, 2017, computer rendering (detail). Courtesy of the artist.

### Inside

Hiba Abdallah, *Souvenir (hat)*, 2017, computer rendering (detail). Courtesy of the artist.

## ARTIST TALK

Saturday, September 16, 1 PM

Please check [artgalleryofmississauga.com](http://artgalleryofmississauga.com) for the latest information on events and programming.

The XIT-RM is a project space showcasing emerging artists in the Mississauga, GTA and 905 regions.

The AGM is proud to partner with Y+ contemporary to present this exhibition. Y+ contemporary is an artist-run space based in Scarborough, co-founded in 2015 by Danièle Dennis, Daniel Griffin Hunt, Dorica Manuel and Tiffany Schofield. Y+ aims to provide an inclusive platform for artistic production, engagement, and experimentation, with a focus on emerging practices.

## XIT-RM

The XIT-RM is a project space dedicated to showcasing the work of emerging artists in the GTA and Mississauga region. Artists are selected annually by the gallery's curatorial team to exhibit work that honours the mission and mandate of the AGM, with an emphasis on contemporary art and critical engagement.

The XIT-RM is generously sponsored by the RBC Foundation.



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**First. New. Next.** The AGM provides platforms for exhibitions, collections and experimentation in contemporary culture with a recent focus on artists and cultural producers from Indigenous, newcomer and youth communities. Through a broad range of educational programs, artist projects and other forms of critical dialogue, the AGM seeks to transcend traditional disciplinary boundaries, foster community, and provide spaces where alternative modes of thought are supported and activated in tangible ways.

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ISBN: 978-1-927595-33-6